THE SOVIET UNION IN 1970

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In 1970, with a display of ceremonial hero-worship not seen since Stalin's time, the Soviet Union celebrated the 100th anniversary of Lenin's birth. A full year in preparation, the elaborately staged event was intended to impress the world and to inspire the Soviet people by dramatizing how much the USSR had accomplished under the rule of the party and state founded by the man honored so extravagantly. The physical changes in the country and in its role in the world were striking, indeed, yet the anniversary merely served to underline the great disparity that existed between the raw power growth of the Soviet Union, on one hand, and the intellectual and ideological stagnation of its ruling elite, on the other. That the views of a man born a century ago and dead almost half that long were still being profusely celebrated as the last word in contemporary politics, economics, social thought and the arts spoke more profoundly about the bankruptcy of Lenin's heirs than about their fealty to him.

Still, the year ended more satisfactorily than the Soviet leaders had reason to expect when it began. Worrisome secular trends in the country's economy remained the major domestic preoccupation in 1970, but there was a perceptible improvement in performance, both in industry and agriculture, compared with 1969. The year began with the harsh strictures of the December 1969 Party Central Committee plenum still ringing in the ears of local party leaders, Soviet factory managers,

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workers, and farm officials. Stunned by a disastrously poor harvest and a sharp decline in the rate of industrial growth, the harried, and probably divided, party leaders fell back on old remedies that must have seemed strangely irrelevant and even counterproductive to the new generation of technologists who came of age during the Khrushchev era. In a "secret" joint letter, read in all factories and offices in the USSR, but never published, the leaders of the party, the government, the trade unions, and the Communist Youth League demanded tighter labor discipline, increased reliance on moral incentives, curbs on vodka consumption that disrupted work, and strict economies in production, including a more intensified search for untapped "reserves" that somehow continued to elude Soviet managers and workers. The widely heralded economic reforms instituted in September 1965 were neither shelved, as critics of the dogmatist persuasion probably hoped, nor given a wider berth, as liberal advocates of modified "market socialism" presumably wished. But the voices of economic reform were noticeably muted after the December 1969 plenum; their opponents had seized the initiative, and if they lacked the power to undo what had been done they had gained a strong position from which to block more thoroughgoing change.

The economy's improved performance in 1970 clearly did not resolve the fundamental economic debate. The country's industrial growth rate was back up to a reported 8 percent, more than one percent higher than in 1969 and quite respectable by world standards even after adjusting for the customary inflation in Soviet economic reporting. Year-end speakers emphasized that the annual plan for industry had been overfulfilled, but did not mention that targets had earlier been twice reduced by planners fearful of another shortfall.

A comparatively mild winter had contributed to boosting the rate of industrial growth, particularly in the first quarter of the year; the weather had even more to do with agricultural successes in 1970. Output was up 6.5 percent. Grain production was reportedly at an all-time high, though still well below the original target of the 8th Five Year Plan that ended in 1970. There were also sharp improvements in livestock production, partly in response to higher prices decreed by

a July Central Committee plenum on agriculture. At year's end, however, it was acknowledged that consumer demands for meat and dairy products were not yet being adequately satisfied.

While the economy's 1970 upturn relieved some of the immediate pressures on the leadership, basic difficulties in Soviet economic development continued to plague Soviet leaders as they wrestled with the draft of the 9th Five Year Plan (1971-1975). There was scant effort to conceal the regime's awareness that apart from the highly privileged military sector of the economy the USSR lagged badly behind other advanced industrial countries in assimilating advanced technology to production. And while the gross national product was larger than ever ("national income" grew at a claimed rate of 7.6 percent in 1970), the resource allocation pinch was not relieved: a progressively larger share of the gross national product had to be reinvested just to maintain a constant rate of growth, while the number of claimants for the economy's resources and the urgency of their claims continued to grow.

Economic questions were evidently at the center of factional struggle inside the Soviet leadership during 1970. Early in the year reports out of Belgrade and Prague indicated that the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership was under fire inside the Politburo because of poor economic performance. But neither the targets of this criticism nor their alleged attackers lost their posts. Despite rumors of suspicious origin about his failing health, Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin was elected in July to succeed himself as head of the Soviet government and the USSR Supreme Soviet reinstated virtually the entire slate of ministers who served under him. However, the balance between Kosygin and Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev tipped heavily in the latter's favor during 1970. Both the public image and the political roles of the party chief were enhanced, inevitably at the expense of his associates in the "collective leadership." Publication of a two-volume collection of Brezhnev's works certified the General Secretary's promotion to the status of at least junior classic among history's great Marxist-Leninists. And the party leader appeared to be moving into domains formally assigned to Kosygin as head of government. It was Brezhnev rather than Kosygin who made the most important Soviet foreign policy pronouncements in 1970

and in May the Party General Secretary delivered a major speech (unpublished) at a session of the USSR Council of Ministers (of which Brezhnev is not even a member) reportedly criticizing the government's draft of the 9th Five Year Plan.

Dispute over targets for the 9th Five Year Plan probably contributed heavily to the biggest political surprise of the year: the postponement of the 24th Party Congress until March 1971, a year later than its statutory convocation date. The Central Committee's decision on a date for the new party congress came in July, not long after Brezhnev himself had stated that it would be held in 1970; it came amidst rumors of a new internal crisis in the Soviet leadership. Whatever the reasons for the postponement, it had the effect of suspending any moves to change the composition of the ruling Politburo which ended the year with its 11-man membership intact.

While the top Soviet leaders grappled with economic problems at home and foreign policy issues abroad, pinpricks of domestic dissidence continued to harass them, attracting wide and embarrassing attention abroad, and perhaps encouraging still others to raise their voices at home. In the official arena of public expression, 1970 saw new victories for the forces of conservatism, dogmatism and repression, highlighted by the resignation of Alexander Tvardovsky as chief editor of the controversial *Novy Mir*. But dissident intellectuals continued to resist, using *samizdat* (self-published) documents and petitions that circulated privately inside the USSR and to sympathizers abroad able to give the Soviet underground material wide publicity. Although the dissidents and protesters almost invariably operated within the letter of Soviet law -- indeed a major point of their effort was to promote the growth of constitutional civil liberties in the Soviet Union by exercising them as widely as possible -- arrests, trials, and imprisonments continued to occur. The KGB (secret police) increasingly had recourse to a particularly pernicious "legal" form of repression against key offenders: instead of trying them as criminals, KGB psychiatrists declared them insane and confined them to special mental institutions. Retired General Pyotr Grigorenko, an outspoken protester

and petitioner since the 1966 Daniel-Sinyavsky trial, was finally taken out of circulation by this means. But a powerful wave of protest, spearheaded by some of the USSR's most prestigious scientists and writers, was evidently instrumental in gaining reversal of a KGB "psychiatric finding" that had placed the prominent biologist, Zhores Medvedev, in a mental asylum for his part in composing a dissident manifesto.

Prominent among Soviet protesters in 1970 was Alexander Solzhenitsyn, acclaimed as Russia's greatest living writer almost everywhere except in his own country, where the press branded him a "spiritual emigrant." Nominated for the Nobel literature prize, Solzhenitsyn was obliged to accept it in absentia, fearing that he would not be permitted to return to his homeland once he left it. "We are exhuming Stalin's body," one Soviet dissident wrote in the underground press when a bust of Stalin suddenly appeared alongside the dictator's grave "and burying Solzhenitsyn alive."

In contrast to Solzhenitsyn, whom the regime would probably prefer to have out of the country, other Soviet citizens took great risks in 1970 to leave the country illegally, an action counted as treason in Soviet law. In the first publicly acknowledged successful hijacking involving a Soviet aircraft, a Lithuanian father-and-son team commandeered an Aeroflot plane in Southern Russia in October and after killing a stewardess who resisted them, compelled the pilot to land in Turkey, where they were granted political asylum over vigorous Soviet protest. In November, another incident involving a would-be Soviet defector had a rather different outcome, shocking American public opinion and eliciting an official expression of dismay from the White House. Apparently acting without authority from Washington, U.S. Coast Guard officials permitted Soviet seamen to board a U.S. Coast Guard cutter to return by force a Lithuanian sailor who had requested political asylum after leaping from a Soviet fishing vessel onto the deck of the U.S. craft. The most notorious affair of the year centered around the alleged attempt by 11 Soviet citizens, nine of them Jews, to hijack a small Aeroflot plane at a Leningrad airport in June and force it to fly to Sweden. Israel was the ultimate

destination of the Jews in the group, several of whom had previously attempted unsuccessfully to emigrate legally. The Leningrad 11 were tried in December and found guilty of treason. The two leaders, both Jews, were sentenced to death and the others drew long prison terms. On the last day of the year, perhaps influenced by worldwide protests against the severity of the punishment and appeals for clemency, the USSR Supreme Court commuted the death sentences. However, new trials of still more alleged Jewish accomplices in the Leningrad "hijack plot" were expected in 1971.

For Soviet propagandists concerned with the USSR's reputation abroad, the Soviet Union's activities in space made better copy than the regime's terrestrial behavior. Overshadowed by the American manned moon landing spectaculars in 1969, the Soviet space program revived in 1970, and scored a series of impressive new "firsts": in June the crew of Soyuz-9 broke all endurance records by completing an 18-day earth orbiting mission; three months later, Luna-16, an unmanned lunar vehicle, soft-landed on the moon, scooped up a small sample of lunar surface material, and returned successfully to earth; and in November, Luna-17 deposited a mobile robot vehicle on the moon which explored the moon's surface by remote control.

The Soviet Union seemed more active diplomatically in 1970 than at any time in the last decade, particularly in Europe where it was widely believed that Moscow wished to deepen the détente in the heart of the Old World. But at the same time, growing signs of a new Soviet assertiveness outside Europe, particularly in the Middle East, threw a cloud of uncertainty over the central Soviet-American relationship precisely at the moment when the advent of rough strategic parity between the two sides was supposed to usher in an era of negotiations and bring to an end a quarter century of Cold War confrontation.

Judging from the great significance which Soviet leaders themselves attached to it, the crowning achievement of Soviet diplomacy in 1970 was the Soviet-West German Treaty of Renunciation of the Use of Force signed in Moscow on August 12 by FRG Chancellor Willy Brandt and Premier Kosygin. The signing climaxed several months of negotiations

that began not long after the election of the new Brandt-Scheel government in Bonn last year. The Kremlin secured from the FRG what has been a central objective of Soviet policy since the end of World War II: acknowledgement of the inviolability of the postwar territorial status quo in Europe, particularly of the Oder-Neisse line and the border between the Federal Republic and the Communist-ruled German Democratic Republic. Moscow presumably also hoped the treaty would weaken FRG-NATO, and particularly FRG-U.S. ties, and that it would improve Soviet access to West German technology, trade and credits.

But to gain Bonn's assent, Moscow was obliged to make some concessions. To the evident displeasure of GDR boss Walter Ulbricht, the USSR dropped its insistence that West Germany grant formal recogition to the Pankow regime of East Germany. Moreover, it was understood between the two signatory powers (although publicly denied by Moscow) that Bonn's final ratification of the treaty would be dependent on a Berlin settlement satisfying Western requirements with respect to secure access rights.

The Four-Power Berlin talks, resumed in March by Moscow in anticipation of the signing of the Soviet-West German treaty, assumed central importance on yet another score when the NATO Council indicated at the end of the year that no decision would be made on Moscow's long-standing bid for a European Security Conference pending conclusion of the Berlin talks. Ulbricht's resistance became a crucial stumbling block to Brezhnev, who seemed eager to present a glowing report on his European policy to the 24th Party Congress. In December, at a summit meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact held in East Berlin, the GDR leader was obliged to adhere to broad formulation backing Moscow's German policy, including an implied pledge to cooperate in a Berlin settlement that would satisfy Bonn's minimum conditions for ratifying the Soviet-FRG treaty.

It was perhaps a sign of the times that the ultra-conservative Ulbricht was the Kremlin's major source of irritation in Eastern Europe during 1970. So well had the "lessons of Czechoslovakia" sunk in that Moscow appeared relatively relaxed about the potential liberalizing effects of Bonn's *Ostpolitik* in the socialist countries. And while

Rumania continued to obstruct Soviet efforts to further the economic and military integration of the East European socialist countries with the USSR, Moscow demonstrated toward Bucharest the kind of patience that reflected confidence the Rumanians knew their limits and would observe them. Even the year-end political upheaval in Poland that brought down Moscow's reliable old favorite, Wladislaw Gomulka, did not seem unduly to ruffle the Kremlin. Edward Gierek, Gomulka's successor as Polish party leader, took pains in his first official statement to reassure Moscow of Warsaw's loyalty, a declaration that must have carried weight with the Soviet leaders precisely because they knew Gierek had to pay a price domestically to make it.

Toward China, the apostate and openly hostile Communist state with which the USSR shares a 4,500 mile border, Moscow adopted a perceptibly less bristling and menacing posture than in 1969 when tension between the two Communist giants exploded several times into bloody border clashes. No fresh incidents were reported in 1970 although military buildups continued on both sides of the border. The level of vituperation in Sino-Soviet polemics was still high with Peking missing no opportunity to condemn the "revisionist" Soviet leaders for colluding with imperialism, and betraying the revolutionary cause. But while Moscow replied in kind, it avoided severe threats of the type that had suggested in 1969 the possibility of a preemptive Soviet strike against Chinese nuclear facilities. Such threats had helped finally to elicit a positive response from Peking to Soviet entreaties to resume border talks between the two countries. But the talks, which opened in Peking in November 1969, dragged on inconclusively with the Chinese side predictably pursuing dilatory tactics. The problem for the USSR was how to maximize chances for desired progress at the talks -- which seemed to require that Moscow exert pressure on Peking -- without risking a reescalation of the conflict. In 1970 Moscow evidently preferred comparative quiescence in Sino-Soviet relations, even without a breakthrough in negotiations, to gambling on a policy that required coercive threats and strong military pressure.

Moreover, despite Peking's intransigence on the major substantive matters at issue between the two countries, the resumption of negotiations

yielded certain side-effects that were desired by Moscow. For the first time since the eruption of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the USSR and the CPR exchanged ambassadors. In addition, a trade agreement signed in the fall provided for a doubling in the volume of Sino-Soviet trade which had fallen to $55 million in 1969 from a high of $2 billion a decade earlier. This evidence that the USSR and China were willing to improve their state-to-state relations, at least marginally, provoked growing concern in some Western circles during 1970, and raised the spectre of some kind of Sino-Soviet rapprochement after Mao's passing.

In Southeast Asia Moscow continued to disappoint Washington's hopes that the USSR would take some diplomatic initiative or exert its influence with Hanoi to bring about a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam War acceptable to the U.S. Government. The springtime American incursion into Cambodia was seized upon in Moscow as fresh evidence that the Nixon Administration's "Vietnamization" policy was designed not to cover American withdrawal but to achieve U.S. dominance in Indochina. The Cambodian events also spurred the reactivation of Chinese policies in Southeast Asia and Peking clearly outmaneuvered Moscow in moving quickly to gain patronage over the new Cambodian exile government of Prince Sihanouk. Soviet concern over renascent Chinese influence in Indochina and elsewhere in Southeast Asia only reinforced Soviet determination to keep its options open with governments of almost all political persuasions in the region. A similar option-building approach characterized Soviet policy in Latin America and Africa in 1970 with Moscow cautiously exploiting new opportunities to establish a presence along business-like state-to-state lines wherever possible.

It was in the Middle East that Soviet foreign policy behavior took on a distinctly more provocative character in 1970, inching the superpowers closer to confrontation in that embattled region of the world. The USSR's involvement in the Arab-Israel conflict deepened substantially in the third year after the Six-Day War as Soviet military personnel for the first time engaged in direct (though not acknowledged by Moscow) military action on the Egyptian side. The crucial decision

to escalate Soviet intervention was taken in January during a secret visit to Moscow by UAR President Gamal Nasser. The Soviet leaders apparently concluded that Israel's deep penetration air raids into Egypt threatened the very existence of the Nasser regime upon which the entire Soviet position in the Middle East was built. To rescue their client, the Russians agreed to provide Egypt with an integrated air defense system including not only SAM-2 surface-to-air missiles already supplied earlier, but also SAM-3s, highly sophisticated systems to provide protection against low altitude attack. These weapons, which had never before been deployed outside the Warsaw Pact, were installed and manned by Soviet crews. In April Israel reported that Soviet-piloted MIG-21-J interceptors had taken to the air in operational missions, evidently to provide air cover for the missile emplacements in the Delta region.

This was the boldest Soviet intervention yet in the Middle East and when it brought down no strong Israeli or American reaction -- Tel Aviv terminated the deep penetration raids and Washington held off urgent Israeli requests for additional Phantom aircraft -- the movement of SAMs toward the Suez Canal was accelerated. Here Israel drew the line and mounted heavy air attacks which almost certainly caused fatalities to Soviet personnel at the missile sites. The point of greatest danger was reached at the end of July when, in an encounter which the Soviets never acknowledged, four Soviet-piloted MIG aircraft were downed in a dogfight with Israeli fighters. With the risk of a larger military confrontation growing rapidly, Nasser, after lengthy consultations with Soviet leaders in Moscow, accepted a U.S. peace initiative that called for a standstill cease-fire in the Canal area while discussions on a peace settlement took place under the auspices of U.N.-appointed Ambassador Gunnar Jarring. Israel's acceptance shortly thereafter may have caught Moscow and Cairo by surprise; in any case, Egypt, with direct Soviet support, promptly violated the standstill agreement, moving quickly under cover of the cease-fire to complete the deployment of a thick network of SAM-2 and SAM-3 missiles, apparently on the correct assumption that Israel would not

break the cease-fire. However, the breach of trust threw a pall over U.S.-Soviet relations.

Having raised its commitment to Egypt by supplying and helping to emplace and operate the new weaponry and conniving in a truce violation made by Egypt with the USSR's most powerful adversary (and its potential partner in arms control agreements of the most sensitive type), Moscow shifted to a posture of moderation, encouraging the new UAR leaders, after Nasser's sudden death, to renew the cease-fire with Israel, despite Tel Aviv's reluctance to resume discussions through Jarring until the standstill violations had been rectified. The Soviet Union also preached moderation during the Jordanian crisis in September; although its role in initiating the short-lived and ill-fated Syrian tank intervention in northern Jordan is unclear, Moscow seemed relieved when the Syrians withdrew and the matter was resolved without either Israeli or American armed action. The USSR's generally passive role during the Jordanian crisis, which contrasted sharply with Washington's vigorous and activist stance, helped restore some semblance of superpower balance in the region toward the end of the year.

Nasser's sudden death at the end of September appeared genuinely to shake the Soviet leaders, who had banked heavily on the charismatic Egyptian president. However, they moved quickly to cement their ties to the new Egyptian regime, sending a high-ranking Soviet delegation, headed by Kosygin, to Nasser's funeral, and offering repeated public expressions of continued support for the UAR and its cause in the conflict with Israel. By the end of 1970 Egypt's dependence on the USSR was so great that it was doubtful whether Nasser's successors could unlock the UAR from Moscow's embrace, even if they wished to do so.

With U.S.-Soviet relations already strained by Moscow's complicity in violating the standstill provisions of the American-sponsored Middle East peace plan, Soviet activities in Cuba suddenly became a source of superpower tension again after an eight-year hiatus. In the fall, a Soviet submarine tender appeared at the Cuban port of Cienfuegos, together with visiting units of the Soviet fleet, and remained in port or in Cuban territorial waters after the other vessels departed.

Around the same time, the presence of large barges of the type used for servicing the nuclear reactors of Soviet atomic submarines was detected in the area and the construction of barracks, a communications center, and other shore facilities was observed at Cienfuegos by U.S. reconnaissance aircraft. U.S. spokesmen charged that the Soviet Union was preparing a base in Cuba for its missile-launching nuclear submarines. In October, however, the Soviet government announced that the agreement reached between former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and U.S. President John F. Kennedy ending the 1962 missile crisis was still being adhered to by the USSR, a declaration that implied Soviet nuclear submarines would not be based in Cuba. Still, as 1970 came to an end, the submarine tender, a virtual floating base in itself, remained in Cuban waters and the issue continued to be a potentially abrasive one.

In the face of these new tensions in Soviet-American relations, Washington's early optimism about the prospects for an agreement at the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) began to wane as the year drew to an end. U.S. defense officials were particularly concerned about the Soviet strategic build-up, which appeared to be continuing without interruption despite the SALT talks. In operational land-based strategic missiles, the Soviet force, which had grown to over 1,300 was already greater by around a third than the U.S. force at year's end. The Soviet submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) force was still less than half the size of the American (200 to 300 Soviet SLBMs as against 656 U.S.), but was reportedly growing at a rate of around 130 missiles a year.

In the SALT talks themselves, the Soviet side appeared to be marking time. The third round ended in Helsinki in December without the long awaited Soviet counterproposal to the U.S. plan which had been tabled during the summer in Vienna. The American side had proposed a quantitative limit on offensive strategic weapons, including a special ceiling on the rapidly growing force of huge Soviet SS-9 missiles, regarded by American planners as the most potentially threatening first-strike weapon in the Soviet arsenal, and offered either to abolish

or set low limits on the numbers of anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs) the two sides could deploy. To the disappointment of the U.S. delegation, the Soviets not only failed to respond to this proposal, but added a new complication by insisting that any limit on offensive strategic weapons must include American nuclear-capable tactical fighter-bombers based in Europe and aboard aircraft carriers from which they might reach Soviet targets. The U.S.-Soviet strategic dialogue seemed to be losing its cool at the end of the year as Soviet spokesmen reacted angrily to warnings by U.S. defense officials that the United States would be compelled to take new decisions strengthening American strategic forces if prospects for an early SALT agreement did not improve. However, as the two sides prepared for a fourth round of talks scheduled to convene in Helsinki in March 1971, there were some new grounds for optimism in reports out of Washington indicating that the Soviet Union had finally begun to slow the deployment of their SS-9 intercontinental missiles and were dismantling a small number of intermediate range missiles as well.